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Title:

APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR DUAL CELL COMMON ELECTRODE PCRAM
MEMORY DEVICE

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APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR DUAL CELL COMMON ELECTRODE PCRAM MEMORY DEVICE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates to a PCRAM device which utilizes a chalcogenide glass memory cell to store a memory state. More particularly, the invention relates to a way of fabricating memory cells in a PCRAM memory device to increase packing density.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Recently chalcogenide glasses fabricated as fast ion conductors have been investigated as data storage memory cells for use in memory devices, such as DRAM memory devices. U.S. Patents 5,761,115, 5,896,312, 5,914,893, and 6,084,796 all describe this technology and are incorporated herein by reference. The storage cells are called programmable metallization cells, also known as PCRAM cells. One characteristic of such a cell is that it typically includes a fast ion conductor such as a chalcogenide metal ion and a cathode and anode spaced apart on a surface of the fast ion conductor. Application of a voltage across the cathode and anode causes growth of a non-volatile metal dendrite which changes the resistance and capacitance of the cell which can then be used to store data.

[0003] For this technology to be used on a mass scale in memory devices it is necessary to fabricate large numbers of memory cells in a relatively small amount of integrated surface area.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0004] The present invention provides a fabrication process and resulting structure which stacks at least two programmable metallization cells vertically in an integrated circuit. The cells can be accessed individually to provide vertical storage of two data bits in a given area of the integrated circuit.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0005] The foregoing and other features and advantages of the invention will become more apparent from the detailed description of the exemplary embodiments of the invention given below with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Fig. 1 shows early steps in the fabrication of a PCRAM cell of the present invention;

Fig. 2 shows the fabrication steps for a PCRAM cell of the present invention subsequent to those shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 3 shows fabrication steps for the PCRAM cell of the present invention subsequent to those shown in Fig. 2;

Fig. 4 shows fabrication steps for the PCRAM cell of the present invention subsequent to those shown in Fig. 3;

Fig. 5 shows fabrication steps for the PCRAM cell of the present invention subsequent to those shown in Fig. 4;

Fig. 6 shows fabrication steps for the PCRAM cell of the present invention subsequent to those shown in Fig. 5;

Fig. 7 shows fabrication steps for the PCRAM cell of the present invention subsequent to those shown in Fig. 6;

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cont'd~~ Fig. 8 illustrates an exemplary PCRAM cell accessing circuit;

Fig. 9 shows how the present invention is incorporated into a computer.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0006] The present invention provides two stacked PCRAM cells which use a common anode located between them. The two stacked memory cells can be accessed separately to store two bits of data which can be read and written. In an exemplary embodiment, the two memory cells are stacked one over the other with a common anode between them to form an upper and lower cell pair. Respective access transistors are provided for the cells and arranged to permit reading and writing of the cells.

[0007] Fig. 1 shows a substrate 11 having a doped well over which the memory cells are formed. The substrate can be formed of any semiconductor material with silicon being exemplary. The substrate 11 has fabricated thereon a plurality of gate stacks, two of which (13b and 13c) are part of MOSFET access transistors 15a and 15b for lower memory cells of the stacked pairs of cells. Transistors 15a and 15b have associated source/drain doped regions 17a, 17b, and 17c. The gate stacks each contain an oxide layer, e.g. a silicon oxide layer 21, in contact with substrate 11, a conductor layer 23 formed of, for example, polysilicon, a conductive silicon layer 25 and a cap insulating layer 27 formed of, for example, silicon nitride. Insulating sidewall spaces 29 of, for example, silicon nitride are also provided. The material composition of the various layers and sidewalls of the gate stacks is not critical as other well known materials used to form the components of a transistor gate stack may also be used.

[0008] As noted, Fig. 1 illustrates the early stages of the fabrication of a pair of stacked memory cells in accordance with the present invention, which begins at the point

where three polysilicon plugs 29a, 29b, and 29c have been formed between gate stacks 13a-13b, 13b-13c, and 13c-13d. The outer gate stacks 13a and 13d are adjacent rowlines for other access areas in the memory array, located on top of field isolation areas 100. Additionally, Fig. 1 shows multilayer cathodes 104 formed on plugs 29a and 29c. The cathodes 104 are formed using a composite conductive layered stack such as a two layer stack, for example, of tungsten nitride (Wn) and tungsten (W) which are blanket deposited and then patterned by CMP and/or etching. The two layer stack can also be made of other conductive materials such as platinum (Pt), titanium (Ti), cobalt (Co), aluminum (Al) and nickel (Ni).

[0009] As shown in Fig. 2, an insulator layer 106 of, e.g. silicon nitride (Si_3N_4) is formed over the Fig. 1 structure and is patterned to form holes 108 over each cathode 104. A layer of chalcogenide glass is next deposited over the Fig. 2 structure and planarized, as shown in Fig. 3, leaving areas of chalcogenide material 105 over the cathodes 104. The chalcogenide glass may be formed as an $\text{Ag}/\text{Ge}_3\text{Se}_7$ material, or other chalcogenide glass compositions which have a fast ion conductor and are capable of growing a dendrite in the presence of an applied voltage. Alternatively, other glass materials responsive to applied voltages to write and send information can also be used.

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[0010] Another insulating layer 112 of, for example, silicon nitride is then formed over the Fig. 3 structure, and is patterned to form openings over the chalcogenide glass areas. An $\text{Ag}/\text{W}/\text{Ag}$ conductive stack, for example, is then formed in the openings, as shown in Fig. 4. This conductive stack combination serves as a anode 110 for the lower memory cell 118 formed by the cathode 104, chalcogenide glass 105, and anode 110, and serves as the anode for an upper memory cell, the formation of which is described below. The $\text{Ag}/\text{W}/\text{Ag}$ stack 114 may be fabricated across a memory cell array. Electrical

connections to the stacks 114 can be made at the periphery contact holes of a memory cell array.

[0011] In the next stage of fabrication, shown in Fig. 5, another insulating layer 124, for example, silicon nitride, is deposited and patterned to form holes 126 over the anodes 110. A silver and chalcogenide glass layer 128 is then deposited with the holes 126 and planarized. As with layer 105, the chalcogenide glass may be formed as an Ag/Ge₃Se₇ material, or other chalcogenized glass compositions, which are capable of focusing a conductive path in the presence of an applied voltage or other glass compositions which can be used to write or read data may also be used. As also shown in Fig. 6, another insulating layer 131 is deposited and patterned to form holes and a conductor 130, such as tungsten, is then deposited in the holes in contact with chalcogenide glass layer 128. A layer of tungsten 130b is also deposited in a hole provided in layer 131 over polysilicon plug 29b. The tungsten electrodes 130a serve as cathodes 132 for the upper chalcogenide glass memory cell 120 formed by common anode 110 and chalcogenide layer 129. Unlike cathodes 104, cathodes 132 are formed solely from tungsten. Additional fabrication steps can now be used to connect cathodes 132 to respective access transistors similar to transistors 15a, 15b and formed elsewhere in the memory cell array.

[0012] Fig. 7 shows a simplified electrical schematic diagram of the upper and lower memory cells 118, 120 as incorporated within a memory cell array 308. Lower memory cell 118 and upper memory cell 120 are each connected to respective access transistors 118_{AT} and 120_{AT}. The transistor 118_{AT} of Fig. 7 corresponds to the access transistor 15a of Fig. 1. Transistor 120_{AT} is a similar access transistor fabricated in the memory array, preferably close to the access transistor 118_{AT}.

[0013] The specific binary values stored within the memory cells 118, 120 of the present invention is determined by respective sense amplifiers 159, 180. As shown in Fig. 7, the PCRAM system of the present invention locates those sense amplifiers 159 and 180 in the periphery of the memory array of the present invention. Using memory cell 118 as an example, a sense amplifier 159 has one input tied to the common anode 110, and the other input tied to the access transistor 118_{AT} device through a column line A through a transistor 150. The access transistor 118_{AT} is connected to a wordline and allows charge to move from the memory cell 118 to the sense amplifier 159 when both row and columns associated with cells 118, 120 are selected, and the lower cell 118 is selected. As an alternative to being tied to common anode 110, the input 158 of sense amplifier 159 can instead be tied to a reference signal which may be another inactive column line.

[0014] Each memory cell pair 118, 120 within the memory array 308 is selected by row and column address signals as is well known in the ~~memory~~ art. To this end, Fig. 7 shows a row decoder 201 and a column decoder 203, which are used to select a row and column associated with a cell pair 118, 120. However, it is still necessary to determine whether the upper or lower member of a cell pair is being addressed. Thus a third decoder, termed a grid decoder, is used to select one of several of the lower 118 and upper 120 memory cells for operation. Accordingly, a grid decoder 170, shown in Fig. 7, designates whether an upper or lower cell is being addressed. Depending on which of two grid addresses is specified the grid decoder 170 will activate a selected word line for transistor 118_{AT} or 120_{AT} .

[0015] The process of reading a memory cell is accomplished by sensing the resistance value of each memory cell, since the storage of a 1 in a memory cell causes the resistance of the dendrite to be significantly larger than if a 0 is stored therein. By observing

the output of the two sense amplifiers 159 and 180, all four binary conditions (00, 01, 10, 11) of the cell pairs can be determined.

[0016] Again referring to Fig. 7, when the access transistor 118_{AT} turns on, a sub-write threshold voltage is supplied to the cell 118. If the cell 118 is in a 'zero' state, a very small current will flow based on the intrinsic resistance of the non written cell, and the sense amplifiers will register a "no current" condition with respect to a reference. If a 'one' has been written to the cell, a much larger current will flow, which will be detected by sense amplifier 159. An alternative to the current differential sense amplifier 159 described above is the use of a voltage detector for sense amplifiers 159, 180.

[0017] Although Fig. 7 shows access transistor 120_{AT} connecting the upper memory cell 120 to a column line B, separate from column line A, since the memory cells 118, 120 are never accessed at the same time, access transistors can also be configured to couple the upper memory cell 120 to column line A. The use of a separate column line B for the upper memory cell 128, however, would enable both cells to be accessed at the same time to simultaneously store and retrieve two bits of data. In such a case the grid decoder can be omitted.

[0018] Fig. 8 is a block diagram of a processor-based system 300 utilizing a PCRAM memory cell and array constructed in accordance with the invention as incorporated within a PCRAM memory device 308. The processor-based system 300 may be a computer system, a process control system or any other system employing a processor and associated memory. The system 300 includes a central processing unit (CPU) 302, e.g., a microprocessor, that communicates with the PCRAM memory device 308 and an I/O device 304 over a bus 320. It must be noted that the bus 320 may be a series of buses and bridges commonly used in a processor-based system, but for convenience purposes only,

the bus 320 has been illustrated as a single bus. A second I/O device 306 is illustrated, but is not necessary to practice the invention. The processor-based system 300 also includes read-only memory (ROM) 310 and may include peripheral devices such as a floppy disk drive 312 and a compact disk (CD) ROM drive 314 that also communicates with the CPU 302 over the bus 320 as is well known in the art. The CPU 302 and PCRAM memory device 308 also may be fabricated on the same chip.

[0019] While the invention has been described and illustrated with reference to specific exemplary embodiments, it should be understood that many modifications and substitutions can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Accordingly, the invention is not to be considered as limited by the foregoing description but is only limited by the scope of the appended claims.

[0020] What is claimed as new and desired to be protected by Letters Patent of the United States is: